

CINEMA ODYSSEY

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**SPEAKS
TO THE STARS!**

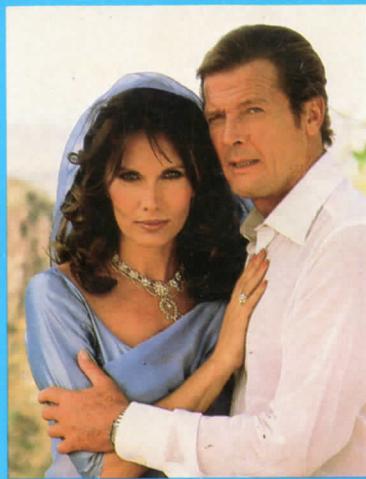
**OLIVIA
NEWTON-JOHN**

**EXCLUSIVE
INTERVIEWS
WITH:**

★ **MARK HAMILL**
★ **BILLY DEE WILLIAMS**
★ **NICHOLAS MEYER**
★ **KIRSTIE ALLEY**
★ **TANYA ROBERTS**
★ **MR. T**
★ **JOBETH WILLIAMS**
★ **JIM HENSON**
★ **DAVID WARNER**
★ **SANDAHL BERGMAN**
★ **ROB BOTTIN**
and much more . . .

AND!

**NOBODY
DOES IT
BETTER!**



OCTOPUSSY

*Exciting Advance Preview of the new JAMES BOND
Adventure starring ROGER MOORE & MAUD ADAMS*



CINEMA ODYSSEY

T.M.



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JIM HENSON'S *DARK CRYSTAL*

A Far Cry From the Muppet Show

In a far-off land, perhaps in another dimension, there is life. Although some races there are friendly and benign, others are totally evil. The monstrous Skeksis rule, aided by lobster-like soldiers that are willing to destroy anything in their path. Death and destruction are commonplace, and magic is the usual means to an end.

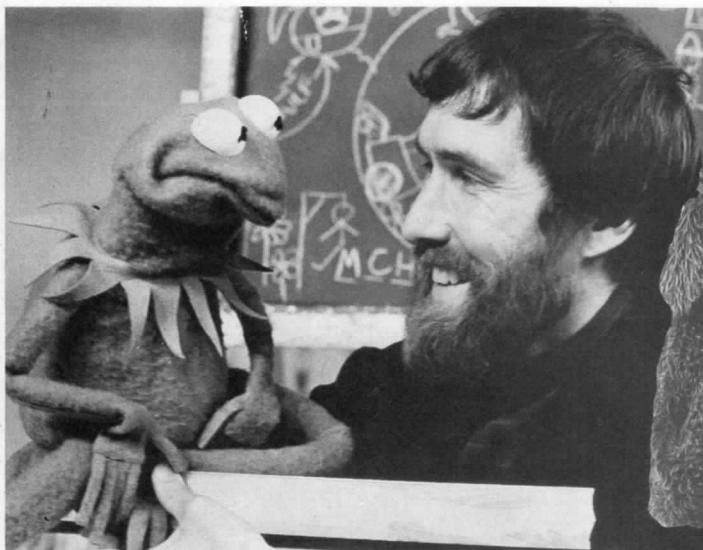
This is the world of *THE DARK CRYSTAL*. None of the beings familiar to us from the incredible workshop of Jim Henson (Kermit, Miss Piggy, Fozzie, etc.) are in this multimillion dollar sword and sorcery spectacular. During an exclusive interview with the muppet master, he told us, "It's a fascinating film, and it was quite a challenge — certainly the hardest thing we've ever tried to accomplish. I really am happy with it. It's been a work of great gratification."

The history of *THE DARK CRYSTAL* is long and complicated. "We had started five years ago, with Brian Froud (noted artist) joining us at that time. I knew the kind of film I wanted to do, and then I saw some of his early work. We got together and decided to come up with this thing.

"He loved the concepts, but of course he had no idea that it would take so long to complete. As we worked on *THE DARK CRYSTAL*, other things came up and delayed it. We began it before we did *THE MUPPET MOVIE*, and Lew Grade was financing both of them. However, he wanted to do *THE MUPPET MOVIE* first — which was fine with me because we

Famous for his work on *SESAME STREET*, *THE MUPPET SHOW* and the Muppet movies, Jim Henson takes a giant step into a new realm.





Surrounded by some of his creations for **THE MUPPET SHOW**.

needed the time for research and development, anyway. Then we did the sequel, **THE GREAT MUPPET CAPER**, which, in retrospect, may not have been a wise decision, because it was not a big success. As films go, I think that the second one was better — probably because I directed **THE GREAT MUPPET CAPER**. I loved directing it. That was the first film I had ever done."

"**THE DARK CRYSTAL** is more of a challenge because I was performing in it more. Once you get inside these creatures, you're really kind of stuck there — which is one of the reasons I asked Frank Oz to direct it with me. Over the years, he and I have had a very good relationship, so that worked out fine."

The film is indeed very complicated and costly. There are vast sets, a multitude of new beings, and a variety of special effects and miniatures. "One of the most exciting moments was when I walked onto the sound stage and saw the set for the Crystal Chamber," Jim recalls. "It was enormous — much larger in life than it appears on film. It looked just like Brian's original drawings, and it resembled what I had always assumed the interior of that castle should look like. I knew that we were in big time movies at that point." This is quite an observation, especially since he has been heavily involved in television and film productions since the 1950's.

THE DARK CRYSTAL is a milestone creation, from a variety of standpoints. "We used all kinds of techniques, from people in costumes to puppetry, as well as marionette techniques. We used anything that would fit for the shot. We had gone into this movie saying that we would



Henson teaches Kermit the frog stroke for **THE MUPPET MOVIE**.



do anything in order to get the shots that we want." The end result is a masterpiece of determination and manpower. On the whole, Jim comments, "We resist calling it a puppet film because it really isn't puppetry, as such. It has puppetry, among other things. You would hardly call E.T. a puppet, for example. You couldn't have done this project a few years ago, without modern radio control devices, modern latex, makeup, and special effects. It's a state-of-the-art film, and I'm sure that a person who does a movie starting now would probably accomplish better things than we did. That's life — that's what it's all about."

The general public takes this sort of accomplishment for granted, particularly where muppets are concerned. However, a great deal of skill, time and patience is required for each minute's worth of screen time. When questioned about the most difficult tasks, Jim revealed, "All of the major Skeksis characters are about equally complicated, as well as Aughra (a witch). She's mechanically complex, but nonetheless she's a lovely character. Any time Frank Oz (who brought us Yoda in *THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK*) does a creation, such as she, he brings such dimension to it. He goes far beyond just what's in the script, and he's very gifted at this."

Henson's views on today's incredibly ridiculous cinema costs are both realistic and interesting. "I resist talking about the budget on *THE DARK CRYSTAL*. We only went slightly above our goal, but every big film has been hurt by discussing its

budget. Any movie above five million dollars cannot justify itself to the average theatergoer. Nothing is worth that, for God's sake."

He was thankful that the motion picture's release date was delayed. "Originally, we were aiming for the end of May, and our initial reason for postponing it was that Universal really didn't have the theaters lined up. There were a bunch of other films coming out, and we saw ourselves coming in in a weak position. Hav-

ing once decided, way back in January, to pass up that opening date, I was very happy because we really needed the extra time. We've been redoing things, and particularly reworking the soundtrack. We keep changing things around a little bit — going back and doing stuff again. We've used this time to do a great deal more work on *THE DARK CRYSTAL*. Had we tried to open in May, God knows what the opticals would have looked like. The last ten minutes of the film contain



A benevolent UhRu in his native habitat.

Leader of the evil Skeksis in *THE DARK CRYSTAL*.



many shots that are optically treated in one form or another."

Elaborating on a few of the alterations, he noted, "When we first did the film, the Skeksis spoke another language. We have since translated them all into English, since we decided that we were kind of losing the audience because of it. Initially, there were no subtitles or anything, but we designed it so that the scenes were all self-explanatory. We made a lot of other changes, including the voice of Aughra."

The main problem now seems to be one of identification. "We try desperately to ask people not to talk about these things as if they were muppets. They have nothing to do with the muppets — they're miles away from them. No matter what you say, people still assume that Kermit and friends are freaking out or

something. We don't have a name for these characters, and Frank and I were discussing this recently. At the moment, we just call them 'creatures,' and we do think of them as such."

Since the new project is so vastly different from his previous work, we wondered why Jim got involved in it. "It's just a

stretch, I suppose. I love puppetry, and what it's capable of. While I love doing the muppets and all of that stuff, that's only one form; and there are a lot of other methods. It was intriguing to me to try and create a very realistic, lifelike creature. We had started all of that well before Yoda and that sort of thing. It was after

doing the segments on SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE that I wanted to go into THE DARK CRYSTAL. By doing those creatures, with the limitations of live television, I preferred to push it one degree further into realism and work with the total dimension that you can get with motion pictures. I wanted to do a complete world, and that was what was really exciting about this new project."

The plot of THE DARK CRYSTAL is a bit complicated in itself. One thousand years before the movie takes place, a natural disaster changed a brilliantly-glowing Crystal of immense magical power. As a result, it became THE DARK CRYSTAL, corrupting a race of beings called the Skeksis and spreading evil across the land. When the story unfolds, we learn that a great astronomical event is about to take place. Should it occur as foretold, the reign of the merciless and ugly Skeksis will continue forever. Fortunately, there are a few races who have not yet fallen under the spell of the evil ones. These include the Gelflings, who closely resemble humans. Jen, a male survivor of the all but extinct race, seeks to end the tyranny of his enemies, and he joins forces with other rebels. The result is fascinating, exciting and wonderful.

"At present," Jim says, "We're working on a series for HBO called FRAGGLE ROCK. It's a weekly children's show, which we had conceived a couple of years ago because we felt that there wasn't enough good children's programming on television. We worked out this show, and it's a lot of fun. It's a whole puppet world, and it is the muppets — but all new ones."

In terms of films, we wait and see what happens with THE DARK CRYSTAL. I have a few things kind of in development, but at the moment I just want to see how the audience responds to this." If THE DARK CRYSTAL is even half as innovative and entertaining as his previous achievements, it should be quite successful; and we wish him well.

Before parting, Jim shared one other bit of interesting info with us. "I had plans to do a Broadway show a number of years ago, that at some point I'd like to get back into. I got part way involved with that, and then THE MUPPET SHOW came along. Someday, perhaps...." ★

by Tom Rogers



Fizzgig, a dog-like being, provides comedy relief in THE DARK CRYSTAL.